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Problems in rural communities stem from the steady downtrend of employment in agriculture, forestry, and mining, while gains in non-farm industries have not been sufficient to offset this decline and provide jobs for a growing rural labor force. There is an increasing deficit of talent in rural areas due to urban migration. The overall strategy to cope with these problems must be to improve the capability of the rural work force to compete successfully for jobs and to create more jobs in rural areas. There is a lack of opportunity for rural youth for work experiences that lead to fulfilling careers without leaving home. Educational work in the field of labor management is being requested by employers in commercial agriculture at an accelerating rate. As a result of projects of Federal agencies, needs for technicians and skilled repairmen will continue to rise, thus imposing continuing demands on education. Through comprehensive planning by community action groups with the help of technical experts, better community facilities and improved educational and job training programs can be provided. (JH)

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IMPROVING OPPORTUNITIES IN RURAL COMMUNITIES*

Please allow me to thank you for giving me an opportunity to say something about solving educational problems in sparsely populated areas through improving opportunities in rural communities. I am impressed with the theme of this conference---A Working Conference on the Solution of Problems. What is being said to this audience is we must offer suggestions for solutions that have promise and will raise our hopes and aspirations that rural American can and will survive, opportunities can be created and people can have a choice of where to live and work.

However, I would like to take the advantage of you just a little in order to get my remarks in the proper prospective. So please allow me to briefly summarize our plight and then point out some things which have been tried and found to be successful.

The problems stem from the steady downtrend of employment in agriculture, forestry, and mining, while gains in rural nonfarm industries have not been sufficient to offset this decline and provide jobs for a growing rural labor force. Between 1950 and 1967, farm employment dropped about one-half due to technological advances and reorganization of production methods. Corresponding, though less sharp, employment erosion occurred in mining and lumbering. This combination of factors has resulted in high rates of unemployment, extensive underemployment, and low family income in rural America.

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*A Paper Read by Henry L. Taylor, Program Assistant to the Administrator of the Rural Community Development Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, at a National Working Conference on Solving Educational Problems in Sparsely Populated Areas, Denver, Colorado - March 17-19, 1969.

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There is a serious deficit of talent in rural areas. This deficit is increasing, due to a constant drain. The drain is not being offset by adequate development of talent on the part of young rural people. Inadequate schools, and many other factors are among the causes of underdevelopment of human resources in rural areas.

The overall strategy to cope with these problems must be:

-- To improve the capability of the rural work force to compete successfully for jobs including new careers.

-- To create more jobs in rural areas and in small and intermediate communities.

One of the most potentially useful resources for tapping potentials for development of talent is the New Careers Program administered by the U. S. Department of Labor. Yet very little of the New Careers Program is operative in rural areas because of failure to develop "Service to People" kinds of occupations. An exception is a training program for Extension program assistants in North Carolina. The North Carolina Extension Service and the Bureau of Work-Training Programs of the Department of Labor have launched an experimental program to train 32 low-income people for positions as Extension Program Aides. This experimental program is coordinated with the Concentrated Employment Program of USDL in 29 counties of eastern North Carolina. It is also a part of the "New Careers" Program of USDL, financed by funds appropriated under the Scheuer Amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act.

The employing agency, in this case the North Carolina Extension Service, established the qualifications for the positions and with the Bureau of Work-Training Programs jointly established criteria for selection of trainees and the training programs.

One distinctive feature of the New Careers Program is that money to pay training costs can follow the individual up a ladder of advancement. For example, these North Carolina Extension Program Aides can be trained for advanced positions that are "in service to people" (in Extension or elsewhere) as they gain more skills.

The Scheuer Amendment funds are paying all costs of the training programs and reimbursing the N. C. Extension Service for the salaries of the trainees during the first year. In the second year, only half of the salaries will be reimbursed, and thereafter Extension will assume the full cost of salaries.

It is hoped that this program will tap a new source of Extension personnel at all levels. It is also hoped that it will enable Extension agents to carry on more effectively educational programs by relieving them of time-consuming routine jobs. The expansion of this program into rural areas could help to meet deficits of teachers, co-op employees, workers in RC&D projects, and many other talents in serious need in rural areas.

Still greater is the deficit of opportunity of rural youth for work experiences that lead to fulfilling careers without leaving home. Yet needs for work lie all around them.

There is a massive need for youth involvement in community development. The energies and capabilities of youth are much needed by communities in a host of urgent problem areas from community physical facility development to individual work with the delinquent-prone or alienated youth. Youth themselves need to be involved. They need a chance to commit themselves to something in which they can have pride and gain a sense of worthwhile accomplishment. To meet this need, 4-H community development teams are proposed.

The teams would be community-based, and for youth 16 through 21 years of age. To participate in the program, youth would identify a needed community task for areas of emphasis. Each youth would agree to contribute 100 hours of service as a volunteer and to participate in a 20-hour training program in connection with this area of service. Teams would range in size from 5 to 10 youth.

Those team members who have completed their voluntary phase of training and service would be eligible to propose a period of service for which they would receive the U. S. minimum wage for a total of up to $500. Based on their interest, the judgment of those supervising the program, and the availability of funds, eligible youth could propose one more period of paid service for which they would be paid not to exceed $500.

Commercial agriculture will always have a special place in the economy of this Nation. One of the needs of which employers of this industry are painfully aware is the need for <u>better</u> labor management. With help of the

Department of Labor, the Cooperative Extension Service is expanding educational work in this field. For example, three specialists on the Florida Extension staff are scheduled full-time this winter, 1968-69, in labor management workshops with supervisors and employers of agricultural labor.

Educational work in this field is being accepted and requested by employers at an accelerating rate. This is because they recognize needs for more effective methods of selecting, hiring, training, supervising, and retaining good employees. They see that they must, on the one hand, compete with industry for labor, and at the same time so manage labor as to make its employment profitable.

The 1966 Amendments to the Fair Labor Standards Act required the Secretary of Labor to issue orders prohibiting employment of youth under 16 in agricultural "occupations" that he finds to be "particularly hazardous" for such youth. The prohibition does not extend to work the young person does on a farm operated by his parent. The legislation makes provision for exemptions where justified.

In 1967 a two year interim order was issued. It bars employment of youth under 16 years of age in 16 agricultural "occupations," notable among which are operating tractors larger than 20 horsepower, combines, corn pickers, field balers and several other manned farm machines.

Exemption was secured for students of Vocational Agriculture while employed in connection with their instruction. Many boys 14 and 15 years old and experienced tractor drivers were left out. An extension for this group was effected in June of 1968. An estimated 10,000 youth have been trained under

this program. Impressive numbers of certificates have been issued in Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin.

The Rural Electrification Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture is helping to bring a new outlook and job opportunities to rural communities. For example, REA loans to rural electric systems in Colorado provide service to an estimated 115,656 rural consumers over 41,151 miles of lines.

REA telephone borrowers in this State provide telephone services to an estimated 13,537 rural subscribers over 5,912 miles of lines.

In Mankato, a small Kansas town that, until a few years ago, was typical of too many rural communities with empty stores, dwindling populations and abandoned farmsteads. But now there is a new look to Mankato. Among other developments, there is a large meat-packing plant, two housing projects, a hospital, a new high school, a million-gallon reservoir, a shopping center, a construction company and a new football field. And there is more to come.

This community-building did not just happen. It began when leaders of the Jewell-Mitchell electric cooperative sparked the community-wide effort to make their town, their area, abundant in opportunity. There is a lot of work ahead--in Mankato as well as across this Nation's countryside. Even though rural America is still plagued with too much unemployment and too few job opportunities, there is a new outlook in the countryside--with America's consumer-owned rural electric systems leading the way to progress--fulfilling their commitment to a better life for the people they serve.

And whom do they serve? More than 25 million rural people through more than a total of 5,760,000 electric meters and 2,302,000 telephones. There is a need for more than 2000 trained linesmen and high demand for telephone and electric technicians and skilled repairmen. These demands will continue to rise, thereby continuing to improve opportunities in rural communities.

Another vehicle for improving opportunities in rural areas is through the local Soil Conservation Districts. They are local constituted units of state government. These Districts, nearly 3,000 of them, blanket the Nation and include about 99 percent of the farms and ranches and more than 95 percent of the agricultural land in the United States. Experience in the past thirty years demonstrates that the Districts are effective means for both individuals and communities to deal with natural and human resource problems. In the past few years, the Districts have taken on new responsibilities along with their regular Soil and Water Conservation program that emphasize regional, community, and economic development. For example, they are sponsoring Resource Conservation and Development Projects of which there are 51 authorized projects in 39 states, that include an area 169 million acres in all or parts of 293 counties.

The purpose of these projects is to provide additional economic opportunities to the people of their areas through accelerated conservation, development, and multiple use of natural resources. Their activities go beyond this. They are helping to bring about community and area improvements beyond the realm of natural resources and environment.

Local leadership organizes for action, and the project is built from the bottom up rather than from the top down. Local people make decisions about their projects, they recognize the need for a multi-county approach, set boundaries large enough to deal with areawide problems and small enough for effective local leadership. They investigate their problems, state their proposals, develop their plans and secure the cooperation of local governmental units as project sponsors.

Local leadership teams up with all Federal, State, and local agencies that can help with meaningful progress. All segments of the community-rural-urban, suburban, coordinate their activities to achieve project goals.

The projects do not depend entirely on Federal or State agencies for funds. For example in the Bitter Root Project in Montana, of the first 36 project measures completed only 14 used Federal funds. Many RC&D projects are functioning without Federal funds.

In the 2852 project measures activated in 28 projects by July 1, 1968, they created 11,000 man-years of continuous employment with a total gross income of $122 million.

The Districts participate in the Great Plains Conservation Program that is helping to bring about solely needed stabilization of soil resources and of the local economy on a planned long-term cost-sharing basis that to date involves 31,122 farm and ranch operators who operate 56,601,700 acres of land under contract with the Department of Agriculture.

The Districts participate in many other rural areas development activities. In all of those activities, the knowledge of District officials, the advantages of their organizational arrangements with cooperating state and federal agencies, along with their ability to represent the people of the community have been valuable. But one of their more important contributions has been to increase the participation of local citizens in the affairs of human and natural resources development thereby exemplifying the principles of democracy and federal-state-local cooperation. They have achieved great things in the American tradition.

Rural opportunities are stepped up whenever you can save the Technical Action Panels in on community problems and needs. A case in point -

Berkeley County is situated in the Eastern Coastal section of South Carolina within a few miles of the Atlantic Ocean where the land is low and flat and where inadequate drainage is one of the major problems.

Two agricultural communities of Berkeley County, Cross and Russellville, have an aggregate of 40 farm families situated on approximately 2400 acres of land. The history of these communities was one of poor drainage resulting in low crop yields and very low incomes which in turn resulted in low standards of living. Health problems were numerous because of stagnant water lying in the yards, under the houses and in the roads.

Many attempts were made by these people to find a solution to their common problems—inadequate drainage. Neither of the groups

ever became properly organized to make a united approach to solving their problems. Individual efforts were fruitless because there was no outlet for the water.

At one of the regular monthly meetings the Berkeley County Technical Action Panel members started tossing around the idea of rendering assistance to these two communities. The first mention of the problem brought expressions of the impossible nature of the project but the TAP's continued to work on this problem. The groups were advised how their objectives could be realized and a course of action was set forth.

The jobs to be accomplished were assigned as follows:

1. The Extension Service would provide the guidance in setting up the appropriate type of organization needed and complete preliminary individual survey sheets for each family.

2. The SCS would provide technical planning and engineering. Also provide outline maps for the areas to be served.

3. The ASCS would provide the necessary pooling agreement and set up the machinery to obtain the maximum benefits of 16 cents per cubic yard to be excavated.

4. FHA County Supervisor agreed to coordinate activities of the panel and provide assistance in working up soil and water association loans if the groups could qualify.

Today these goals have been achieved. Through the determined efforts of two groups and the close cooperation of an

interested TAP, 40 families are now farming and residing on 2,430 acres of farmland with new hopes and increased opportunities. Now they can look forward to better homes; home sites that can provide septic tanks, better roads, more healthful living conditions and a higher standard of living.

Another example of Technical Action Panels getting a piece of the action was when the County TAP assisted the Tri-County Recreation Association, Incorporated in Lincoln County, Colorado, to complete a recreation complex. This development group had investigated grant and loan funds from several agencies. Grant funds were not available at the time and carried a stipulation that the facilities must be offered to the public free of charge. This was not feasible for this project because income was needed to repay the loan on the land. Some of the land was taken out of crop reserve. The Farmers Home Administration worked with a group on a conservation dam which could be used for fishing as well as flood control. All agencies cooperated with the total project. The facilities will provide a meeting place for groups and include a club house, golf course, tennis court, and trap-shooting range. The project not only made the community more attractive, but will provide pleasure for young and old alike for many years to come. In addition to providing electric service, the local electric cooperative provided office and meeting, and clerical assistance to the Association.

What I have been emphasizing is the need for community organization and group action to improve job opportunities in rural communities. It cannot be

left to chance--you must make it happen. Rural communities can be improved by determining what you want from the human standpoint in terms of size, population and industrial concentration, and from a dollar value in terms of the cost of public services to differing intensities and patterns of concentration. The next step is to propose to states, local governments and the private sector what steps to take to attract and encourage people to settle in the countryside, to create job opportunities and to build new towns and cities where there is sufficient space to live.

This approach calls for people to organize and plan for full development of community resources on a county or multi-county basis; to encourage comprehensive planning among rural development groups that will provide for schools and job-creating enterprises in goods and services. Such planning will help to improve and stabilize commercial agriculture and maintain a balance between supply and demand for farm commodities. It will inform businessmen of the economic and personal benefits of locating new plants outside areas of congested traffic and the reservoir of trained or trainable residents to man these plants.

If you, through comprehensive planning, ever can provide for greater community facilities, eliminate hunger and poverty, and improve our education and job training programs, provide better housing, increase outdoor recreation and improve the natural beauty; conserve and further develop our natural resources, improve health, improve transportation, and provide a better program of welfare for those who need it, with these accomplishments you will be in line with what

President Nixon wants when he said "I propose that we provide the equality of opportunity which will give our people a chance to develop the kind of society they want. If this is done, we can safely leave with the people themselves the decision as to the balance between rural and urban living." Thank you.